

## [Patrick Reilly]

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PUB. Living Lore in

New England

TITLE Shoelaster of Lynn - [#1?]

WRITER Jane K. Leary

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COMMENTS

Name— Jane K. Leary

Informant—Patrick Reilly, 165 Fayette St., Lynn

Assignment—The Shoe Laster

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“I been a laster fur more'n fifty years. I wuz a hand laster.”

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This informant has lived in Lynn for more than fifty years. Questioning will bring forth the information that he no longer resents the fact that the lasting machine usurped many hand lasters "about twenty-five year ago" but that he resents the fact "there ain't no more white men a-workin' in the shops a Lynn ", , " and "only two er three white shops in the town now."

All incoming groups from southern Europe that came into Lynn as the result of the morocco strike of the '80s, and the shoe strikes ensuing ensuing from the installation of the lasting machines, were included in those groups that were not "white ". ." Deduction brings the conclusion that those who are "white" were either Yankee, Irish or Irish American. Questioning him a bit further, exudes the avowal that those who spoke English at that period, namely some of those of French descent, also might enjoy that classification. Mass. 1938-9

He is particularly verciferous vociferous in his denunciation of the Jews and those shoe shops managed by Jews and backed by Jewish interests.

"They don't even use their own names. Ya can't tell who'se runnin' more'n two er three shops in Lynn today. I 2 been a shoe laster mosta my life, but I don't know the names a more two er three shops today. Guess they're ashamed ta put their names to the shops they run. Here today and gone tomorra.

"And taint only the shoe shops they've ruint. They got mosta the money in this country today. There's 135 million people in this country today and the Jews has got 80% a all the dough. That's a lotta dough. They oughta get taxed and give some one else a chance to earn a little. All millionaires oughta be taxed. That's socialism maybe, but if it is, I'm fur it."

He denounced too the high rentals asked for shoe shop space in Lynn, and the tendency to tear down buildings rather than rent for low prices. "That's what chasin' the shops down east, and some a the shoe makers with 'em. Why down at Auburn, ya can't go out in the

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street but what ya'd see some one ya'd know from Lynn, fur they moved up there with their families. An' not only the workers but the managers a shops moved up there with the plants. An' them manufacturers 'ould rather be in Lynn, here where they ought ta be. Why if a part of a machine broke down there, it takes two er three days ta get it. An here ya could get it in no time, and put it in the machine in five minutes. But up in Maine they give 'em rent free and power fur a certain time, and that's what draws 'em."

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He cited large brick buildings that have been torn down to illustrate his point. One, until a year ago, stood opposite the Lynn station of the Narrow Gauge depot. Another was the Lennox building on Blake Street.

"Will they all come down eventually?" I asked him and he responded, "You tell me."

Those hugh square brick structures, now empty, that housed shoe shops in decades past, date from the aftermath of the Lynn fire of 1889. "Before that the shops wuz all made a wood. Brick come in right after the fire. But there's been cobwebs in thm them brick buildings fur more'n twenty year now."

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We discussed living conditions in Maine as compared with here. "Here ya can't rent four er five rooms that's fit ta live in less'n nine ten dollars a week, and there ya kin get a whole house fur \$14 a month." He wouldn't admit though that a worker would be just as well off with a low wage where expenses were low, as he was with high pay and high rates for food and rent, etc. "Why should a man work fur half when he kin get double fur the same time?" The actual money passing through his hands seemed highly important to him.

Mrs. Reilly took a highly different view of matters. She claimed that some years ago "when a shoe worker wuz makin' sixty'er seventy dollars a week, he shoulda been satisfied ta take a cent er so less a case when the boss would ask him. They could afford ta take less." She pointed out that the manufacturer had a right to make a substantial profit on his

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investment. Mr. Reilly agreed with this but still he said, "the worker oughta make a good wage because it wuz his skill that made the manufacturer rich."

He cited the case of a couple of erstwhile Lynn manufacturers. One in particular "I worked at the bench with, before he started in makin' shoes. Well he got up, and he made a lotta money, and then he went down east so he could get cheap labor. Well he come back here broke, and it wuz good fur him. He's dead now an' I'm glad of it.

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He had no business desertin' the skilled workers that made him rich.

"An' the same thing happened to a lotta others."

This informant also deplored the method used in tanning leather today as compared with the old "morocco" tanned in Lynn and Peabody for the Lynn shops.

"Years ago it took three months ta season a skin; now it only takes a day, 'cause it's done with acids. That's what makes the people's feet burn. Ya notice how the linin' a the shoe gets stained after ya weat [wear?] 'em a while. That's from the acid in the leather. An' it goes right through the shoe linin' ta the foot."

When asked about the comparative merits of hand lasting with machine lasting, he said, "In hand lastin' ya kin stretch the skin down with the pincers so as it will wear better an' fit better than ya kin with a machine."

We spoke a bit about the different kinds of skin. "Different skins are as different as paper on the wall.

"Kangaroo skin is the best leather made because it is soft and easy on the foot ant it wears good. But it's hard work fur the laster cause it's hard ta stretch.

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"Kid is a nice soft skin. But most shoes that's sold fur kid skin is jest goat. Snake skin wears good, but that's cracky hard stuff ta work on."

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" When asked where the skins came from he responded "No we don't get 'em from out West. They come from across the Pond."

Forty-five year ago when the first lastin' machine wuz tried out in the shop of Mark Worthly, there wuz 1700 hand lasters in Lynn. "Taint more'n a third a that many lasters today, fur a machine kin easy do the work a three hand lasters. An' there's no hand lastin' done today.

In [a?] number of the shops of Lynn today, a section of the shoe is lasted by hand lasting method before it is tacked to the innersole by the niggerhead. The informant undoubtedly meant that no shoe is entirely lasted by hand today.

"There wuz a laster's union when that first machine wuz put in. An' if the lasters wanted to then. They coulda voted in favor of the machines and so have been the ones to run 'em. But they thought they wun't work, an' so they voted against them an' had a strike. An that brought the foreigners in ta run the machines.

"The men that got out, at that strike, either hada go back at what ever jobs they could get, or they went to the G. E. If it wan't fur the G. E., Lynn would be nothin' today. If that ever closes up er moves away from Lynn, this town 'ould be bankrupt over night. Might jest as well go down ta Lynn beach an' throw the key a the city in the tide. Fur the shoe shops is dead. " #